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ABSTRACT

Over the past 2 decades community colleges have developed an increasing reliance on the use of part-time faculty, generally rationalizing the practice as an important strategy for saving money and maintaining flexibility. Critics have seen the extensive use of part-timers as a disturbing trend, and several groups have attempted to set limits on the ratio of part- to full-time faculty. However, part-time faculty are good and highly motivated teachers, receiving the same ratings and achieving the same student outcomes as their full-time counterparts. They bring breadth, depth, and relevance to the curriculum and allow colleges to teach subjects that would otherwise be excluded from the curriculum. They can provide a strong link to the community and to the workplace, as well as a tried and tested talent pool for recruiting full-time faculty. If care is taken to provide for their professional development and integration into the mainstream of the institution, part-time faculty can be key institutional assets. The professional development of part-time faculty should include an orientation workshop, a mentor program, and workshops and seminars on topics such as testing, grading, and teaching. Part-time faculty should also be provided opportunities to contribute to the instructional program and be recognized and be paid for their contributions. Colleges are overdue in viewing part-time faculty as full and equal members of the collegium. (ECC)

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PART-TIME FACULTY: PARTNERS IN EXCELLENCE

John McGuire

The use of part-time faculty in community colleges is generally considered a necessary evil, rationalized as an important strategy for saving money and maintaining flexibility. Some have decried the overuse of part-timers as a cheap fix, a dangerous addiction, or exploitation of the worse kind. However, part-time faculty are a problem only if they are relegated to the margins of the institution and treated with the respect usually reserved for skeletons in the collective community college closet.

In fact, a good case can be made that part-time faculty bring important benefits to community colleges. If care is taken to provide for their professional development and integration into the mainstream of the institution, part-time faculty can be key assets in the delivery of quality, up-to-date instructional programs.

The Alleged Problem

Over the last two decades community colleges have developed an increasingly greater reliance on the use of part-time faculty. Comprising 41 percent of all faculty in 1973, part-time faculty had grown to 60 percent by 1986. The percentage appears to have stabilized around 60 percent of the total number of faculty employed, though they generally account for a considerably smaller percentage of the total number of credit hours taught. Still, it is not uncommon for urban community colleges to have levels of 70 percent to 80 percent part-time faculty.

Dire Warnings. Many have decried this over-reliance on part-time faculty as a serious problem. The Commission on the Future of Community Colleges reported: "The increasing numbers of part-time faculty at many colleges are a disturbing trend. We urge that the unrestrained expansion of part-time faculty be avoided." The National Education Association described part-timers as a "corps of unregulated personnel" that can be exploited "by unscrupulous administrators and boards."

Others have established formulae to limit the use of part-time faculty. A report by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching recommended that no more than 25 percent of the faculty be made up of part-timers. The Futures' Commission recommended, "a majority of credits awarded by a community college should be earned in classes taught by full-time faculty." A 1989 composition conference recommended that the number of part-time writing teachers "be kept to a minimum," and "When more than 10 percent of a department's sections are taught by part-time faculty, the department should reconsider its hiring procedures." In 1988, California went so far as to legislate staffing ratios of 70 percent full-time to 30 percent part-time faculty.

No Evidence of Ineffectiveness. However, there is a conspicuous lack of evidence that part-time faculty are ineffective teachers to warrant either hand wringing or legislation. In fact, most studies comparing full-time and part-time faculty report little or no difference in teaching effectiveness. A 1980 study by L. H. Willett found no significant differences between the two groups on student ratings of teaching, class retention, or student achievement in subsequent classes as measured by grades. A 1986 Miami-Dade Community College study involving 1,075 students in 38 sections of English 101 found no significant differences between students of part-time and full-time faculty in grades in the next English course or scores on a competency-based exit exam.

Redefining the Problem. More likely, the biggest problem appears to be institutional neglect of part-time faculty, who are routinely treated as second class citizens—the "neglected majority." In large part, part-time faculty have been excluded from the collegium. They are not so much a neglected majority, as an excluded majority. They are not invited to faculty division meetings, are not included in faculty development activities, do not participate in textbook selection, do not advise students, and do not participate in developing or approving curricula. The most common solution proposed to address the alleged problem of part-time faculty is to limit, reduce, or eliminate their use. A better solution is to include and involve them in the collegium. If part-time faculty are qualified to step into the classroom, they are also qualified to assume other faculty responsibilities.

Benefits of Part-Time Faculty

The extensive use of part-time faculty may not be only a necessary evil. Such use may also reflect enlightened leadership. Under proper circumstances, part-time faculty can strengthen and benefit a college and its curriculum in a number of ways.

Good Teachers. Part-time faculty are good teachers. They receive the same student ratings and achieve the same student outcomes as full-time community college faculty—who are nearly universally acknowledged to be the best teachers in higher education.

Curriculum Resource. Part-time faculty bring breadth, depth, and relevance to the curriculum and

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allow colleges to teach subjects that would otherwise be excluded from the curriculum. The variety of their skills and experiences allow instruction in exotic foreign languages and specialty occupational areas, which would be difficult to offer with only full-time faculty. Many are practitioners of their profession, and they bring state-of-the-art practices into the classroom that help bridge the gap between the classroom and the workplace.

Commitment. Part-time faculty generally are highly motivated to teach. One study found that intrinsic rewards and contributions to human development were the most important motivators for them. Given low rates of pay, it is clear that most are not teaching for the money.

Link to Community. Part-time faculty provide a strong link to the community. Each is an ambassador for the college to its community, and many are community leaders themselves. They can assist a college to build networks and linkages with its larger community.

Link to the Workplace. Part-time faculty often provide an effective link to area employers and job markets. They help ensure that curricula remain up-to-date and matched to industry practice. They can help place students in jobs after program completion or for part-time experience while enrolled. Also, links to employers can open up opportunities for the college to provide customized training programs, which are usually revenue producers for the college.

Talent Pool. Part-time faculty provide a tried, tested, and talented pool for full-time faculty recruits. In 1989, Austin Community College reported that 69 percent of its newly hired full-time faculty came from its part-time faculty. That same year, Foothill-De Anza Community College District reported that 64 percent of its new hires came from its part-time faculty ranks.

Economy. Part-time faculty do save money, between one-third and one-half of the cost of using full-time faculty. In a very real sense, they help subsidize programs and full-time faculty salaries; however, this is the most dubious benefit. If savings remain the driving motive for using part-time faculty, colleges will treat them as second-class citizens and will be reluctant to provide the resources necessary to support their teaching and integration into the institution. Part-time faculty are only a problem when they are viewed as a source of cheap labor. When employed responsibly, they become treasured resources for the instructional program.

Development and Integration of Part-Time Faculty

Too often, colleges fail to integrate part-time faculty into their institutions. A 1982 study found that only 31 percent of community colleges provide a formal orientation for their part-time faculty. More needs to be done.

Development. Effective professional development for part-time faculty should include the following types of activities. A 6-8 hour workshop should be required of all new part-time faculty before the semester begins. Topics should include the mission and philosophy of the community college, methodologies for teaching adults, the essentials of effective teaching, course preplanning and syllabus preparation, and tips for the first class session. It is important to pay part-time faculty for attending such workshops and scheduled activities.

A mentor program can be an effective development strategy. Veteran faculty, including veteran part-time faculty, serve as mentors by visiting classes, assisting with course and material preparation, and acting as resources on effective teaching strategies. New faculty and mentors jointly set performance goals and evaluate progress toward them. Peer classroom observation by trained observers with immediate feedback to the instructor and a written report to the division chair can also be used effectively as long as such evaluation is strictly formative in nature. Student evaluation can aid professional development for part-time faculty.

A complete development effort will include workshops and seminars on topics such as testing and grading, collaborative learning, learning and teaching styles, and use of instructional technology. These activities help part-time faculty to become better, perhaps outstanding, teachers. They send a message to part-time faculty that effective teaching is important at the college and that the college is prepared to help them become better teachers.

Integration. Part-time faculty should also be provided opportunities to contribute to the instructional program, and they should be recognized and paid for their contributions. They can be effective in student advising, textbook selection, curriculum development, grant writing, and committee service. They should be provided office space and clerical support, invited to all department meetings scheduled at times when they can attend, and encouraged to attend college social functions.

Institutions need to develop sensitivity to part-time faculty and to be alert to unintended messages contained in college policies, publications, or administrative behavior that convey to part-time faculty that they are marginal members of the collegium. It is critical to remember them at contract time, and to raise their salaries proportionately when full-time salaries are raised.

Employment of part-time faculty is not going to diminish over the next decade. Colleges are overdue to begin viewing part-time faculty as important resources and full and equal members of the collegium—and to begin treating them accordingly. Rather than struggling to define appropriate limits on the number of part-time faculty, colleges must work to provide them with professional development activities and to integrate them into the institution. The use of part-time faculty is not an addiction to be cured. Instead, colleges need to kick their habit of discouraging part-time faculty from being the partners in excellence they have the potential to become.

John McGuire is president of Owensboro Community College, University of Kentucky System, and a graduate of the League for Innovation's Executive Leadership Institute. He previously served as dean of instruction at the Community College of Aurora, Colorado. For citations to the studies referred to in this abstract, call (502) 686-4403.

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Don Doucette, editor

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